

# The THREADGILL ESTATE: From Farming to Forestry

By *LaKedra Byrd*

Outreach Forester, Alabama Forestry Commission, Southwestern Region

**S**umter County is a rural Blackbelt county in the west-central part of Alabama. It consists of 680,555 acres (907 square miles) and includes the towns of Livingston (county seat), Cuba, Epes, Emelle, Gainesville, and York. The Alabama-Mississippi state line forms the boundary to the west and the Tombigbee River forms the boundary to the east.

Agriculture is the main enterprise in the county where the climate is favorable for grain and livestock farming. The major cash crops are corn, soybeans, wheat, and hay production. There is a small timber industry that produces plywood, pulpwood, and sawtimber.

Mr. and Mrs. Obadiah Threadgill relocated to Sumter County in 1948, when he accepted a position to teach Agriculture Education in the Sumter County School System. Obadiah, a native of Wilcox County, loved farming and wanted to share his expertise with the community. Theresa, who was born in Perry County and had also been raised on a farm, was thrilled about the offer.

Since farming was a way of life for the Threadgills, they purchased six acres of open-land country in 1950 and started a small farm. They used it primarily for cash crops and it served as supplemental income until their children completed school.

In 1958, Theresa and Obadiah purchased additional acreage with the idea of diversifying their farm. In 1970, their

farm grew to 106 acres. He bought the necessary equipment to maintain over 100 head of cattle, produce truck crops, and start a self-contained hay system. In 1988, after becoming successful hay producers, the Threadgills received The Merit Farm

property at a natural productive state. In making this transition, they contacted the Sumter County Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC) office for management assistance. After sitting down and planning for the future, they decided their

primary objective would be timber production which would bring in long-term income. The secondary objective would be wildlife management. In August of 1999, Patrick Smith, Sumter County Ranger with the AFC, completed a TREASURE Forest Plan for the Threadgills to follow.

Unfortunately, while implementing these practices, Obadiah's health failed. But Mrs. Threadgill and the children pulled together and continued to pursue the management objectives. Theresa, who had been an extension agent for 25 years, knew the importance and benefits of good land stewardship. She and her husband had instilled these values

in their family. After Obadiah's death, she wanted to continue the dream that they had of becoming successful timber producers.

While following the management plan very thoroughly, she and the family sold the cattle and converted 38 acres of grazing land into a pine plantation. Later, they planted an additional 40 acres. They



*Mrs. Theresa Threadgill at her home in Sumter County.*

*Photo by LaKedra Byrd*

Family Citation. This annual award is given by Tuskegee University to a deserving Alabama farm family that exhibits agricultural success and community service.

## FROM FARMING TO TIMBER

After working the farm for more than 40 years, their management objectives changed to a long-term, less labor-intensive goal. They wanted to maintain their

*(Continued on page 30)*

# Wild Thangs

## Clay's Ultimate Duck Recipe

The marinating portion of this recipe should be prepared at least four hours in advance to cooking (I prefer to marinate in the fridge overnight). It is a very labor-intensive recipe that pays heavy dividends at the table. I find an "assembly line" system with a friend speeds up the preparation of the tasty morsels. For those of you who have "tried" duck and didn't like it, this one's for you! This recipe's end result has the flavor of tender roast beef.

You can expect 2-3 large halves per person for "eaters" and 1-2 large halves for "lightweights" (large ducks: Mallards/Gadwalls).

### Ingredients

**Zesty Italian Dressing**  
**Philadelphia Cream Cheese**  
**Dale's Steak Sauce**  
**Jalapeno slices**  
**Tony's Creole Seasoning**  
**Powdered Ranch Dressing**  
**Adobo Seasoning (optional)**  
**Toothpicks**  
**Sliced bacon**  
**Ziplock bag (gallon)**

Rinse deboned duck breasts before preparing. Remove the "tenders" portion of the breast and set aside. Using a sharp fillet knife, butterfly the breast by starting on the thin edge and work toward the thicker side so as to leave a "hinge."

Place opened halves and tenders in a gallon ziplock bag and add liquid ingredients enough to cover the breasts. For those of you who don't like it salty, ease off the Dale's. I prefer a 4-to-1 mix of Zesty Italian Dressing to Dale's Sauce. To add a little zip, add 2-3 oz. of jalapeno juice.

After marinating, place moist halves on a cookie sheet in the opened position (like a book). Here's where the assembly line comes in!

Generously sprinkle the Tony's, Adobo, and powdered Ranch dressing in the cavities. Place one to two jalapeno

slices in the halves and follow up with a "finger-sized" portion of cream cheese (I know this sounds crazy, but it makes it 200% better).

Fold slices together like closing a book and then roll into a fist-like ball. Use the bacon to completely cover the ball and anchor with toothpicks. It usually takes two slices to enclose the melted cheese after it hits the grill (very important). Take the tenders and use two toothpicks as skewers for every five pieces (this will be your "during cooking"

snack or for children, so you don't have to hunt for shot).

On medium-low coals, cook halves while turning regularly. Place the tenders skewers away from the heat to prevent burning. When the bacon appears edible, remove halves from grill (foolproof method). This generally takes about 8-12 minutes, depending on heat. You do not want to over-cook duck; it needs to be medium rare if possible.

This form of dining requires the use of your hands, so be prepared to dig in. In other words, you may not want to serve at a formal event! Remove the toothpicks and slice across the grain in ¼ inch slices. Some folks like to eat the bacon, peppers, and everything! I prefer to remove the peppers before eating. Caution your guests about "winning the prize" though. Steel shot has a tendency to ruin dental work!

This recipe blends well with Lipton seasoned rice and fresh-baked bread or potatoes. Many years of trial and error have gone into this recipe and I haven't found anybody yet who didn't love it! 🍴

**Clay Morris**  
**"Addicted2Dux"**  
**Procurement Forester,**  
**Boise-Cascade**  
**Jackson, Alabama**

## The Threadgill Estate: From Farming to Forestry

*(Continued from page 16)*

intensively managed and thinned 50 acres of bottomland hardwoods leaving the most merchantable timber to mature. They constructed fire lanes for wildfire protection, which also served as an additional food source for wildlife. They currently maintain year around food plots for wild game and also lease the hunting rights on a 40-acre tract. Although focus has changed to timber, they still retain a small acreage for hay production to bring in annual income and to cherish memories of the farm when Obadiah was alive.

While successfully managing the property, Winfred Andrews, from the Greene/Sumter County Natural Resource Conservation Service saw the remarkable accomplishments they were making on the farm and nominated them to become candidates for the TREASURE Forest program. After completing the necessary management recommendations, the Threadgill family became TREASURE Forest landowners on December 9, 1999.

Mrs. Threadgill who is now 83 years old, owns approximately 187 acres in three counties and still resides on the farm. Her children and neighbors help care for the property. When she is not working on the farm, she is involved in many organizations which include: Retired Teacher's Association, American Cancer Society, Family Life Committee, Busy Bee Club, and The Alabama Cooperative Extension Employee Organization. She stays busy with hobbies such as creative writing, sewing, quilting, and doll-making.

Mrs. Theresa Threadgill has received many awards and has proven to be a good steward of the land. She knows that she will not see the final harvest of the timber, but she wants to leave this TREASURE for her and Obadiah's children and the community of Sumter County to enjoy. 🍴